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Q4(c)

"Anomie is rooted in social structure." Explain with reference to R.K. Merton's contribution.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- "Anomie is rooted in social structure." Explain with reference to R.K. Merton's contribution
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Merton rooted anomie in structure:** universal success goals versus stratified means.

Durkheim's weak regulation is the ancestor; Merton specified a modern success culture.

Five adaptations map structurally produced deviance, including **innovation** and **ritualism**.

The account is not a psychology of bad persons.

Marx, Mead, and Indian caste-gender closure still thicken the structure.

Introduction

Anomie is a breakdown or contradiction in norms. Robert K. Merton located it in the social structure, not in a weak individual conscience. The famous strain is between culturally prescribed goals and socially structured means.

Body**From **Durkheim** to Merton**

- **Emile Durkheim** treated anomie as weak regulation, as in a division of labour that outruns moral rules, and as a type of suicide.
- Merton kept the word and moved the mechanism to American, and by extension modern, culture: success goals are universal; legitimate means are class-stratified.

Structure as the root

- Culture defines goals, such as money success. Social structure distributes access to education, property, and jobs.
- When all are told to win and many are blocked, strain is produced by the pattern, not by a sudden loss of all norms.
- **Adaptations are structural responses:** conformity, **innovation**, **ritualism**, retreatism, and rebellion.

Why this is not a psychology of greed

- **Innovation**, including much crime in Merton's sketch, is a use of illegitimate means toward approved goals.
- **Ritualism** clings to means when goals recede. Bureaucracy can breed that pattern, which links to **Weber's** office without **Weber's** full theory.
- The typology shows that deviance can be a normal output of a skewed structure.

Limits

- The five boxes simplify motive. Interactionists after Mead ask how labels and situations produce the "deviant".
- **Marx** would root strain in class exploitation, not only in a cultural success myth.
- Gendered goals and caste closure in India need extra structure beyond the American Dream sketch.
- Merton still improved functionalism by admitting dysfunction inside an apparently integrated order, against a simple Parsonian calm.

Flow diagram

Cultural goals -> Anomie strain
Unequal means -> Anomie strain
Anomie strain -> Five adaptations

Conclusion

- **For Merton, anomie is rooted in a mismatch that the social structure organises:** universal goals, unequal means. **Durkheim's** regulation problem is the ancestor. The five adaptations map structurally produced deviance. Class, caste, and labelling remain needed supplements.

Facts & figures

Merton anomie

Strain between culturally approved goals and legitimate access to means.

Innovation

Approved goals with illegitimate means; Merton's sketch of much utilitarian crime.

Ritualism

Scaling down goals while clinging to institutional means.

Durkheim anomie

Insufficient moral regulation of appetites and of the division of labour.